Nova Scotia
Advisory Council on
the Status of Women

Working with Women
2005–06

The Advisory Council's work for women's equality is felt in government and beyond. They've been a force for nearly 30 years and I'm proud of their accomplishments, especially this year.

Carolyn Bolivar-Getson
Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women advances equality, fairness and dignity for all women in Nova Scotia. We advocate on behalf of women and we link governments and community through our networks and partnerships.

Sonja Power
Chair, Advisory Council on the Status of Women

Sonja Power and Hon. Carolyn Bolivar-Getson

2008-03162/

Women in Nova Scotia want an equal voice in our society, fair pay and pensions, freedom from violence, and good health and well-being. This report reflects the council's accomplishments for and with women of Nova Scotia. Please contact us if you have questions, comments or suggestions.

An equal voice in our society...

Women must be included and our institutions need women's participation in decision-making. All women, regardless of their age, their ethnic or cultural background, their ability, their income level, are affected by decisions of governments. Their perspectives and input are invaluable.

Working with Mount Saint Vincent University, we held **our second non-partisan campaign school for women** in 2005, and it was as successful as the first event. That event attracted the attention of *Homemakers*, a national women's magazine, which told our story in September 2005. The magazine called the Advisory Council web site a leading resource on preparing for electoral office and called our *Votes for Women* publication "the ultimate manual on running for office."

A partnership with the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities and the YWCA, and support from Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, yielded a research project on how to encourage women to take part in municipal decision-making. When Steering Committee chair and Windsor Mayor Anna Allen presented the Untapped Resources report to municipal councillors in October, th[illegible] accepted the recommendations without hesitation, and the project continues into 2006-07.

Frances Mills-Clements of Annapolis County has worked on behalf of and has inspired women in her community for decades. To honour her, local organizations including the Advisory Council established a foundation in her name to provide bursaries for women of African descent seeking post-secondary education. In 2005, West Kings District High School graduate Ashley Simms was the first recipient. She is pursuing a career in screen arts.

Women's contributions during wartime and in peace were the focus of the **2005 Agnes Dennis Lecture**. Historian Dr. Janet Guildford, Dr. Major Marial Mosher (retired), and Commander Elizabeth Steele awed their audience with stories of service and dedication. The annual lecture is sponsored in partnership with the Local Council of Women of Halifax to celebrate Women's History Month. The partners thank the Canadian Forces and Veteran's Affairs for working with us on this event.

21% of municipal councillors and 14% of Members of the Legislative Assembly in Nova Scotia are women

again shared their views and experiences settling and living in Nova Scotia with representatives of the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, the Advisory Council, the Atlantic Metropolis Centre of Excellence – Gender/Immigrant Women Domain, and YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs. The second round table group offered issues and suggestions related to recognition of international professional credentials; availability of employment that pays an adequate salary; English-language training; access to affordable childcare, and information that would be helpful to immigrants. The next step is to develop an action plan to ensure that further work to attract and retain immigrants incorporates the perspectives of immigrant women.

of African Nova Scotian Women from Cumberland County was screened as part of the 25th Atlantic Film Festival. The 40-minute documentary brings to life the contributions of six women to their community, families, and church life. It was co-produced with Eastlink Communications and the Cumberland African Nova Scotian Association.

Fair Pay and Pensions...

Many Nova Scotia women are thriving in today's economy, but for too many, poverty is a daily reality.

Despite higher levels of education overall, most women still work in retail and clerical jobs. Their earnings are low, with little or no employment benefits or security.

The responsibility for caregiving continues to rest largely upon women. Many reduce working time to care for children or other family members, reducing current and potential retirement incomes.

The Advisory Council and other partners brought two leading-edge thinkers on women's economic equality to Nova Scotia audiences this year. Dr. Marilyn Waring, New Zealand economist, delivered a lecture on women's unpaid work to Halifax audiences in May. In October, **Dr. Jane Jenson**, a Trudeau fellow and educator at McGill and the University of Montreal shared with audiences the importance of women's unpaid caregiving work in the wider social context.

Women make up just under 60% of students enrolled in Nova Scotia universities and earn 60% of degrees granted in the province.

The Women, Work and Care Forum in October brought together researchers, policy people, labour unions, government departments, and women, to talk about women's lives and the effect of policy on women's choices and opportunities. In her lecture and keynote address during the forum, Dr. Jane Jenson explained the social and economic reasons for improvement of early childhood education and care, maternity/parental benefits, dependent care and family friendly workplaces.

Dr. Jane Jenson

Broadening the range of occupations women choose is a key to increasing their opportunities for better pay. The Advisory Council works with industry sector councils as well as labour and women's organizations to increase recruitment and retention of women to their industries.

As well, a three-year venture called [redacted] is being piloted at the Bridgewater campus of the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC). In May 2006, 18 women were enrolled in the program to begin their studies in trades and technology in the fall. The Advisory Council has joined with Nan Armour, Hypatia Society; Doreen Parsons, the Women's Economic Equality Society; provincial and federal government departments and NSCC to attract and retain women in trades and technology occupations.

Through our involvement in **Techsploration**, we also work to encourage teenagers to increase the range of occupations they consider. Techsploration has introduced more than 550 Grade 9 girls to occupations in the sciences, trades, and technology. The Advisory Council contributes to planning and implementation each year.

The Advisory Council's ***Guide for Girls*** booklet, launched in September 2005, helps teenaged girls make decisions for the future. Input from Nova Scotia teens and suggestions on preparing for work and career, dealing with friends and family, managing money, and getting involved in community made it incredibly popular, with 10,000 copies going out to girls across the province.

The Advisory Council advised government on helping to reduce women's poverty through legislative changes and through policy reforms. Council staff supported a forum on public pensions, sponsored by the three western Nova Scotia women's centres and participated in follow-up research released in Halifax in April. The forum brought women living on public pensions together to clarify issues and propose solutions.

The Advisory Council is deeply concerned about the federal government's decision to replace the national childcare programs with limited financial assistance to parents of preschoolers. A submission to the Department of Community Services' public consultation on childcare recalled the vital link between an appropriate and adequate childcare system and parents' ability to work or study. Families with preschoolers are simply better able to thrive and parents are better employees and students when childcare provides good support. The province's economic success depends upon this support to the extent that it relies upon working parents and on children who are ready for school.

A brief to the federal Department of Labour brought women's perspectives and concerns to their review of the labour standards portion of the Canada Labour Code. The Advisory Council recommended developing standards that reflect human rights legislation and that promote a living wage; extending labour standards to "non-standard" work arrangements; protecting pregnant workers' job assignments; and creating family-friendly work places.

Freedom from Violence

Reminding Nova Scotians about violence against women is an annual responsibility as well as an opportunity to forge new working relationships with the many organizations whose work is touched by the issue.

About 100 people attended the Advisory Council's annual commemoration of the [illegible] on December 6 at Province House. This year, discussion focused on Nova Scotians' efforts to reduce violence against women in their homes, communities, and workplaces. Advisory Council members took part in a wide range of vigils and ceremonies held in all parts of the province.

Jackie Stevens, Avalon Sexual Assault Centre

Janet Hazelton, Nova Scotia Nurses' Union

84% of sexual assault victims in Canada in 2004 were women.

The Advisory Council released its ***Sexual Assault in Nova Scotia: A Statistical Portrait*** that day, illustrating Nova Scotia's high rate of sexual assault. Improved services for victims of sexual assault are needed in all parts of the province.

The Advisory Council's work with partners includes support of community groups in developing a **Silent Witness Project** in Nova Scotia. Our in-kind support and assistance have contributed to completion of a web site and information meetings in six communities. Halifax Police Victim Services Unit representative Susan Ivany described on December 6 how the project makes real the message about family violence and the progress we are making against it.

The Advisory Council took part in the development of the province's Elder Abuse Strategy, ensuring that it included women's concerns and perspectives.

Near the end of the year, three Mi'kmaw women, Brenda Tracey, Ella Paul, and Jean MacLean along with the Council Chair and two staff members attended Building Healthy and Safe Families and Communities: Policy Forum on Aboriginal Women and Violence, a federal-provincial-territorial policy forum in Ottawa. A working group has been formed to increase community outreach and education and to develop an intervention model that provides support to families living with violence.

Good Health and Wellbeing

Women's health concerns and experiences differ from men's, so they must be considered separately when health programs and services are being planned. The Advisory Council works with researchers and policy makers to accomplish this, and two successes stand out for 2005-06.

Through the Healthy Balance Research Program, in which we are a lead partner, Canadian Policy Research Networks held a roundtable to consider policy response to the physical, emotional and financial burdens family caregivers face. Roundtable members called upon candidates in the federal election to support a strategy on caregiving to replace the existing patchwork of services and supports with a better system for those who need it most.

The Advisory Commission on AIDS, Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health – Gender and HIV Program, Dalhousie School of Health and Human Performance, and Status of Women, brought together researchers, and community and government participants to explore ways to analyze how **gender relates to HIV/AIDS work**. They will continue this work, including considering how diversity increases women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

Getting the Word Out

The Advisory Council's full year meant more media coverage and wider and greater awareness of women's equality issues. Our web site, which is an important source of information for researchers, the public, women's organizations, government and the media, had more visitors last year than ever before, continuing a five-year growth trend.

The Advisory Council will continue to work in the areas above, and in other ways to advance equality, fairness and dignity for all women in the province. Full details on the Advisory Council on the Status of Women's accomplishments during 2005-06 are included in our accountability report, which will be published in December 2006.

Advisory Council on the Status of Women Members, 2005–06

Sonja Power, Chair – Fundy Region
Linda Carvery – Central Region
Mary Elizabeth (Liz) Chisholm – Highland Region
Ebi Cocodia – Central Region
Jean d'Entremont – South Shore Region
Maria deVries – South Shore Region
Shelley Goodwin – South Shore Region
Anne Kelly – Central Region
Patricia LeBlanc – Cape Breton Region
Holly Meuse – Valley Region
Doreen Paris – Highland Region
Rita Warner – Cape Breton Region

Publications 2005–06

Guide for Girls

Submission of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women to the Government of Canada's Federal Labour Standards Review, November 2005

Sexual Assault in Nova Scotia: A Statistical Profile, December 2005

Fact Sheet on Violence against Women, December 2005

Untapped Resources: Women and Municipal Government in Nova Scotia

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